

# The contexts of mask. On another note to the considerations of Rev. Edward Wojtusiak on the social uniform

Konteksty maski. Na marginesie rozważań ks. Edwarda Wojtusiaka na temat munduru społecznego<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Forty years ago the *Kultura* i *Spoleczeństwo* magazine published a sociological essay by Reverend Edward Wojtusiak (1905-1983) on the subject of "social uniform." It contains reflections on the shaping of human social personality, inspired by the views of Józef Chalasiński. The concept of social uniform refers to those concepts perceiving social life as if it were a drama staged in a theater. The leading topic of the essay is a multifaceted presentation of the issues of "mask" in formal and material terms, as a concept used by psychologists, philosophers, sociologists and practitioners to explain various aspects of human expression in social contacts. The views of classics such as Richard Müller-Freienfels, Karl Jaspers, Otto Tumlirz, Ludwig Klages, Paul Guillaume, Ernst Harms and Carl Gustav Jung were used. Referring to the aforementioned theatrical metaphor, we can assume that in the most general approach to the subject, a mask is understood as a sign or a system of signs communicating various aspects of human personality "on the stage of life". Due to the current pandemic situation, the concept of mask, previously functioning mainly as a term of theoretical considerations, has been supplemented with a number of new meanings related to its universality and the necessity to use it in various situations of our everyday life. This includes, among other things, its impact on interpersonal communication and the relationship with the expression of extreme attitudes towards epidemiological threats, manifested by putting on or refusing emotions from facial expressions, and confronts the applicability of classic mask theories in explaining and searching for new research aspects for this content-relevant construct in the field of social sciences. Rich in content the essay by Rev. Edward Wojtusiak seems to be a good starting point for the exploration of the issue, and the upcoming anniversary of its publication prompts us to refer to this text.

Keywords: mask, social uniform, social personality, interpersonal communication, Rev. Edward Wojtusiak

**Abstrakt:** Przed czterdziestoma laty ukazał się w czasopiśmie "Kultura i Społeczeństwo" esej socjologiczny autorstwa księdza Edwarda Wojtusiaka (1905-1983) na temat "munduru społecznego". Zawiera on refleksje nad kształtowaniem się osobowości społecznej człowieka, zainspirowane poglądami Józefa Chalasińskiego. Pojęcie munduru społecznego nawiązuje do tych koncepcji, które postrzegają życie społeczne na podobieństwo dramatu wystawianego w teatrze. Wiodącym tematem eseju jest wielostronne przedstawienie problemu "maski" w ujęciu formalnym i materialnym, jako pojęcia wykorzystywanego przez psychologów, filozofów, socjologów i lekarzy na wyjaśnienie różnych aspektów wyrażania siebie przez człowieka w kontaktach społecznych. Wykorzystane zostały poglądy klasyków takich jak Richard Müller-Freienfels, Karl Jaspers, Otto Tumlirz, Ludwig Klages, Paul Guillaume, Ernst Harms i Carl Gustav Jung. Odwolując się do wspomnianej metafory teatralnej można przyjąć, że w najogólniejszym ujęciu tematu maska rozumiana jest jako znak albo system znaków komunikujących różne aspekty ludzkiej osobowości "na scenie życia". Obecna sytuacja pandemiczna spowodowala, że pojęcie maski funkcjonujące dotychczas głównie jako termin rozważań teoretycznych został uzupełniony szeregiem nowych znaczeń związanych z jej powszechnością oraz koniecznością przedmiotowego używania w różnych sytuacjach życia codziennego. Należy tu między innymi jej wpływ na komunikację interpersonalną oraz związek z wyrażaniem skrajnych postaw wobec zagrożenia epidemiologicznego, manifestowany poprzez zakładanie lub niezakładanie maski w miejscach publicznych. W artykule przedstawiono wyniki wybranych badań psychologicznych z lat 2020-2021 nad wpływem noszenia masek na odczytywanie emocji z wyrazów twarzy oraz skonfrontowano użyteczność klasycznych teorii dotyczących maski w wyjaśnianiu i poszukiwaniu nowych aspektów badań dla tego ważnego treściowo konstruktu z obszaru nauk społecznych. Bogaty treściowo esej księdza Edwarda Wojtusiaka wydaje się być dobrym punktem wyj

Słowa kluczowe: maska, mundur społeczny, osobowość społeczna, komunikacja interpersonalna, ks. Edward Wojtusiak

<sup>1</sup> Artykuł w języku polskim: https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2022-2Doman.pdf

# Introduction

It was forty years ago that the Kultura i Społeczeństwo magazine published a sociological essay by Reverend Edward Wojtusiak, devoted to the issue of "social uniform". The author, who was a doctoral student of the outstanding Polish sociologist Józef Chałasiński, based his considerations on the views of his master. The work by Rev. Wojtasiuk, kindly received by the sociological community at the time of its publication, became "suspended in vacuum" in the long run. For over three decades, it has not received any quotations or polemics, not to mention an attempt to further develop its theses and include them in the discussion on social personality. It can be said that it contributed to the area of "discontinued science", where ideas and research are that have not found anyone to undertake them and develop them creatively (Domański 2014).

Perhaps the theory of "uniform" or social "uniform" is not very attractive to contemporary sociologists, but it does contain elements of interest to psychologists, for example, considerations about the mask (which is one of its basic elements). Unexpectedly, the current pandemic situation, the economic, social and psychological effects of which are experienced all over the world, has opened up a new area of research. The mask, this time not as a theoretical construct but as a real object, plays one of the main roles in this drama of the "time of the plague". An abstract term that was used to describe certain behaviours and attitudes adopted in social life, became a designate of the commonly used utensil of personal protection. This transition from a meaningful scientific metaphor to an everyday object will be discussed in further detail below. What is particularly worth considering, is whether and how the theoretical approaches to the function of the mask in the life of an individual and community proved successful in the context of the new role it has recently started to play in social life. Reverend Edward Wojtusiak's lecture on the "social uniform" is useful here because it has structured the knowledge about its various types and the meanings resulting from it.

#### A brief note about Rev. Wojtusiak

The biograpy of Rev. Wojtusiak's was published several times in biographical dictionaries, including those by Nowak (2004), Adamek (2007) and Szymański (2011). IN 2009 "Rocznik Sądecki" published an article about him, by Rev. W. Taraska. These works can be supplemented with the use of previously unpublished record sources from the National Archives in Kraków, which provide new, hitherto unknown data. Edward Jakub Wojtusiak was born on 26 July 1905 in the centre of Cracow in a house located at ul. Basztowa 9. He was the firstborn son of Stanisław, a railway and post office clerk, and Salomea Gołąb. On 6th of August that year, he was baptized in the Cracow parish of St. Szczepan in Cracow by priest Andrzej Kościółek (former vicar of the parish in Andrychów). He had a sister and two brothers. One of them, Julian (1910-1985) later became an engineer and professional officer in anti-aircraft artillery. Before the Second World War, he was stationed in Toruń, and after its outbreak, he participated in the Battle of Bzura. He was a prisoner of war at the Murnau Oflag<sup>2</sup>.

Edward Wojtusiak attended schools in Krosno and Mielec, and then the 1st State High School (Pol.: "Gimnazjum") in Tarnów. After being awarded his secondary school-leaving examination certificate in 1924, he entered the Higher Theological Seminary there. In June 1928 he was ordained a priest in the Tarnów cathedral by Bishop Leon Wałęga. As a new presbyter, he became a vicar in the parish church in Nowy Sącz. From 1932 he was the parish priest in the Ochotnica Górna parish. Four years later he was transferred to the parish in Barcice. His interest in the sociology of religion resulted in the work entitled "Scocjologiczne podstawy Akcji Katolickiej: próba syntezy" ["Sociological foundations of Catholic Action: an attempt at synthesis"], published in 1934 by the St. Wojciech Bookstore in Poznań. In 1937, he started his course in sociology at the University of Warsaw. Due to the costs and difficulties in reconciling his studies with priestly

<sup>2</sup> National Archives in Cracow: Civil registry files of the Roman Catholic parish of St. Stephen in Cracow from 1904, 1905 and 1910.

service, he soon resigned from the rectory in Barcice. In the same year, he published, in Tarnów, a study entitled "Modlitwy mszalne – szkołą apostolstwa" ["Mass prayers - a school of the apostolate"], which was then recommended by diocesan authorities as reading for lectures conducted by members of the Catholic Action<sup>3</sup>. In 1939, reporting to the supreme authority that he was taking the last of the exams prescribed for his studies, Rev. Wojtusiak applied to take over a vacant parish priesthood in the diocese. In June 1939, he was assigned to the parish in Dobra near Limanowa. From the first weeks of his ministry, he proved to be an effective property manager and a fine animator of parish life. Patriotic sermons, which he did not stop after the outbreak of the war, despite the threat from the occupant, were the reason for his 1941 arrest by the Gestapo. First he was imprisoned in Nowy Sącz and Tarnów. In April of that year, he was sent to the Auschwitz camp, and from there, after a month, he was transferred to the camp in Dachau, where he stayed until his liberation, in April 1945. He spent the next year in France, where he was a chaplain at the Paris V repatriation camp and studied sociology at the Sorbonne. In July 1946 he returned to his parish in Dobra. He was entrusted with the office of the dean of the Tymbark Deanery. He obtained permission to continue his studies at the University of Lodz, where in 1947 he received a master's degree in philosophy in the field of sociology, and in 1950 a doctoral degree on the basis of his dissertation "Genealogia społeczna duchowieństwa diecezji tarnowskiej" ["Social genealogy of the clergy of the Tarnów diocese"]. In the post-war period, Rev. Edward Wojtusiak belonged to the Union of Former Nazi Prisoners and Concentration Camps (Pol.: Polski Związek Byłych Więźniów Politycznych Hitlerowskich Więzień i Obozów Koncentrayjnych). He was a member of the Polish Sociological Association and the Scientific Society of the Catholic University of Lublin. He has published numerous works in the field of the sociology of religion and culture as well as the field of methodology of sociology and auxiliary sciences of history. In 1978, he received the

Brother Albert award "for creating an exemplary parish museum in Dobra near Limanowa." He founded this memorial room in 1956 and was its custodian for many years. In 1980, at his own request, he was dismissed from the function of the parish priest in Dobra. He planned to continue his scientific writing and to compile a chronicle of his parish. However, he was unable to implement these plans. He died on 6 December 1983 in the Limanowa hospital, a few hours after a car accident in the Biernaty estate in Dobra.

Magdalena Adamek, whose article I used to source most of the above biographical information, wrote: In the activity of Rev. E. Wojtusiak, there was a clear correlation between pastoral, scientific and social work. Despite the fact that faith remained the supreme value for him, it was through the prism of science that he attempted to see better opportunities for fulfilling priestly duties and social tasks. [...] He looked at all manifestations of social and religious life from the position of a sociologist, therefore he saw and pointed out anachronisms of attitudes and actions, even in the bosom of the Church" (Adamek, 2007, p. 365).

# 1. The social uniform

The pivotal concept of the essay by Rev. Wojtusiak was "uniform", which in sociological works appears in two different conceptualizations. The first of them, literal one, concerns the social function of the uniform as a kind of outfit (dress) used to identify a specific group of people. This approach is analyzed, for example, by Nathan Joseph and Nicholas Alex in their repeatedly cited article The Uniform: A Sociological Perspective (1972). It gives the "uniform" the features of a tool that helps to distinguish certain communities by defining their boundaries, also rendering it easier to understand the hierarchy of their members. In the second approach, which is the subject of our present considerations, the term "uniform" has a metaphorical meaning, and the adjective describing it ("social") denotes its function in the broadly understood community.

<sup>3</sup> This work is now forgotten and omitted in the bibliographies of Rev. Edward Wojtusiak, although it was an important contribution to explaining the essence of the rites of the Holy Mass.

Reflections on the "social uniform" appear in the work of the above-mentioned Józef Chałasiński, who wrote that "Everyone behaves as required by a uniform, clothing, which is the basis of the portrait of a person. A uniform is not only clothing, it is the entirety of customs and the ideas that make up the human being as a social being. The better the uniform fits, the less noticeable is its presence" (1969, p. 95). Social uniform is shaped by the epoch, so it changes throughout history. Individuals must "put on" the current form of uniform, because if they fail to do so, they will face issues with adjusting to society. However, social uniforms vary in a given period under the influence of antagonistic ideologies. Members of various groups are required to wear their assigned social uniforms. Man gets used to the fact that his social uniform is woven from different roles and attitudes. Understanding this structure allows us to get to know the essence of the social uniform, and indirectly "to understand the social personality of man and his participation in the drama of life" (Wojtusiak, 1982, p. 108).

Without further elaborating on this thread, it is worth noting that the "clothing" analogy of the social identity of a man also appears in the considerations of other authors. Roman Zawadzki (2010) characterizes this aspect of identity, which is also sometimes referred to as assigned identity: "The social identity can [...] be considered as a kind of covering, a cover surrounding the real interior of the human psyche. So it can be a social decoration, mask, camouflage, armor, challenge, provocation, make-up; there are countless varieties of its forms" (Zawadzki, 2010, p. 105). The concept of the mask is thus closely related to the theory of the social uniform, which significantly explains its dominant position in views on the formation and expression of social personality.

# 2. Universality of the mask

In his inspiring and still current book *Poznanie chore*go Antoni Kępiński wrote: "Social life, especially in its superficial contacts, which constitute the overwhelming majority of interactions in human life, forces the use of a *mask*. It can be understood as superficial layers of the psyche - ways of behaving and reacting related to a specific social situation or role" (Kępiński, 1989, p. 46). Also Rev. Wojtusiak treated the problem of masks as one of the issues of the sociological workshop (Tarasek, 2007). In addition to an extensive essay on the subject, which he left in the manuscript, he devoted most of his essay to the problem of social masks. It is worth referring to this knowledge, which he gathered based on the works of the classics, and consider how helpful it is, or maybe even valid today, when the mask is no longer just a figurative word, a theatrical or ball prop, or a souvenir from a visit to exotic countries, since it has become one of the symbols of two conflicting attitudes during the pandemic. If previously the problem of the mask was mainly about hiding one's true nature (or face) from the environment, now it has acquired completely new meanings, as evidenced by the research of psychologists presented later in the present text.

As already mentioned, in the traditional approach, the issue of the mask can be considered both from the formal and from the material point of view. Reverend Edward Wojtusiak described these possibilities in some detail, referring mainly to the works of psychologists, philosophers and psychiatrists, such as Richard Müller-Freienfels, Karl Jaspers, Otto Tumlirz, Ludwig Klages, Paul Guillaume, Ernst Harms and, naturally, Carl Gustav Jung. The mask analyzed from the formal point of view concerns the human self, or rather the image of reality reflected in it, which may be unmasked, masked or falsified. On the other hand, masks considered in the material aspect, i.e. taking into account the matter in which they are expressed, are divided into physiognomic (appearance), linguaphonic (speech), dress (outfit), residential (apartment), positional (social position), external-ideological (when the presented ideology is contrary to personal beliefs) and external-ethical (when the presented moral attitude is inconsistent with actual moral behaviour) (Wojtusiak, 1982). It is impossible not to notice that in this approach, which the author sourced mainly from the works of Karl Jaspers, the concept of a mask becomes a synonym of numerous features, objects and activities accompanying the human beings, by means of which they create in others (or perhaps in front of themselves too) an image of their personality. Moreover, the presence of masks in social life is related to two types of activities, "masking" and "unmasking", and their universality leads to the conclusion that they are nothing more than a kind of game in which everyone participates and that takes place everywhere.

It is interesting that although it is difficult to find any simple analogies between the concept of the mask as an element of the social uniform and the present situation in which the objectified mask has become the basis of new issue, there is an analogy in at least one aspect. It is contained in group reactions in the form of intergroup and intragroup conflicts arising from the 'wearing' of masks. Thus, although in the theory presented by Rev. Wojtusiak, the conflicts around the mask have a different source and social significance (they concern the type of mask understood as sharing a specific worldview) than the disputes about the sense of wearing a mask (an object of personal protection) during the pandemic, they become, after all, an expression of an ideological struggle.

# 3. The new face of the mask

The typology of masks, presented by Rev. Wojtusiak, although very broad and capacious in elements, does not cover all the contexts in which the mask functioned in culture and social life, and does not allow to classify all the issues that emerged in interpersonal interactions due to its common (and mandatory) use. There was no resistance, as long as it could be worn voluntarily, and not due to an official order imposed by the authorities. The pandemic created a social reality in which the existing theoretical and speculative considerations about the types and functions of the mask were expanded with new content. In 2020-2021, there was a number of articles were published signalling the emergence of hitherto unknown psychological problems resulting from new rules of contact between people. Several of these works, which describe only one topic, are worth mentioning here.

Claus-Christian Carbon and his team studied the effect of wearing face masks on reading the emotions of a person so protected. The subjects assessed the emotional expression of randomly presented faces expressing various experiences (anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, neutral state) when it was fully visible, and once covered with a half-mask. What was clearly noticeable in the latter case were the lower accuracy of reading emotions and lower confidence in self-assessment. Moreover, researchers found certain patterns of confusion consisting in misinterpreting the faces of disgusted people as expressing anger, and judging emotional expressions such as joy, sadness and anger as neutral (so in practice it means a problem with recognizing the current experiences of the interlocutor) (Carbon, 2020).

What seemed important in the context of the requirement to wear masks, also in school and other pedagogical institutions, were the results of research on their impact on the socialization of children. The obtained results are not at all unequivocal. Already at the beginning of the pandemic A. L. Ruba and S. D. Pollak (2020) drew attention to the social implications of children wearing masks on their faces, by constructing an experiment in which school students (aged 7 to 13) were shown faces partially covered by sunglasses, half masks and fully uncovered. The researchers found that "the children were still able to draw accurate conclusions about emotions even when only parts of the face were hidden. These data suggest that "[...] it is unlikely that masks will dramatically disrupt the social interactions of children in their daily lives" (Ruba, Pollak, 2020, p. 1).

The team of M. Gori, L. Schiatti and M. B. Amadeo (2021), conducting research on the ability of children, aged 3 to 5, to recognize the emotions expressed by the facial features of people around them, found no confirmation of the above findings. The authors concluded that the situation forced by the use of specific personal protective equipment may have serious impact on the development of social and emotional reasoning of young children, and therefore the development of their social abilities should be carefully monitored. Even if such conclusions seems to be too far reaching, it is worth recalling the experiments on the reaction of infants to the facial expressions of their caregivers, which confirm how important this is the area of shaping social relations. This issue seems to be significant in that studies other than aforementioned of slightly older children confirm the disturbance of effective non-verbal communication, including reading such important emotions as disgust, fear and sadness caused by wearing masks on the face (Carbon, Serrano, 2021).

Equally interesting are the results presented by J. L. Scheid et al. (2020), who studied the physiological and psychological consequences of wearing masks in relation to the requirements of the pandemic period. Even though their research concerned the situation in the United States, these conclusions can be generalized to other populations. According to the authors, there is a clear impact of the requirement to wear a mask in public space on the fulfillment of basic needs such as the need for autonomy, participation and competence. The need to participate requires one to align with others. This raises, for example, the dilemma of having to belong to one of two clearly mutually exclusive groups (masked and non-masked). In the US, this translated into identification with a specific political party, as their leaders had extremely different attitudes to the mask wearing requirement. These researchers also suggested a correlation of the attitude of acceptance or rejection of masks with gender identification leading to mental discomfort. They found that the existence of social pressures "to make men tough" (Scheid, 2020, p. 7) resulted in a negative attitude towards wearing masks, with far-reaching psychological consequences, such as the feeling of shame during this activity. The aforementioned sense of competence, which is put to the test in the face of contradictory messages concerning the protective effectiveness of masks against viruses, which most citizens encounter on a daily basis, is also not without significance. The need for competences is realized through the belief in one's own effectiveness and in controlling the situation in which a person finds itself. Meanwhile, ambiguous opinions on the personal protection measures do not provide the desired (positive) feedback on one's own behaviour and therefore increase the feeling of discomfort.

We may end the present, brief due to limitations of space, review of research conducted by psychologist on the topic of our interest, with the conclusions of the article published in "Scientific Reports". It highlights the problem of re-identifying the person previously seen in the mask and, of course, the disturbance of the ability to recognize the emotional expressions of people wearing masks, and in particular to form an opinion about their credibility on this basis (Marini et al., 2021). As we all know, people carefully observe the faces of others to make sure that the messages conveyed to them through other channels of mutual communication are consistent.

While the results of the psychologists' research cited here seem to provide some arguments to opponents of universal mask protection, they should not be decisive in determining the attitude towards physical measures taken during the pandemic; the protective value of the mask is proven and emphasized in many medical reports (see e.g. Howard et al., 2021). Therefore, the authors of research in the field of social and developmental psychology are looking for different solutions that could eliminate the limitations in interpersonal communication resulting from wearing a mask. One of the aforementioned works suggested the use of compensatory actions in social interactions in areas such as body language, gestures and verbal communication (Carbon, 2020).

# Conclusion

Can the conclusions from psychological research on how social contacts are altered due to the common necessity to use masks as a real objects supplement the philosophical considerations of the main character of the present article about the place and role of the abstract concept of mask in social life? Seemingly, these are two different worlds of research reflection that are linked solely by the use of the same concept that is broad in meaning. On closer reflection, however, we can see that life has created a paradox that requires a new insight into the issue of the mask. According to Rev. Wojtusiak (1982, p. 115), the traditional concept of mask in social sciences meant more or less "a natural or conventional system of signs used by man to express, in a socially comprehensible way, real or alleged states of consciousness and their corresponding functions". In such an approach, the mask contains some information directed to the recipient and it is not important whether it is real or its role is to deceive others or construct an illusion. Its task is simply to "emphasize certain attitudes to the world and strengthen certain opinions about a human individual, regardless of how contrasting with the speaker's private personality they might be" (Wojtusiak, 1982, p. 126). The mask as an object of everyday use cuts off information and prevents the recipient from understanding the experiences of another human being (those expressed by facial expressions). Its symbolism is therefore closer to the metaphor of a wall that prevents us from knowing what is hidden on the other side.

One should also not forget about other problems resulting from the attitude to the mask as an object of personal protection. After all, it became the object of reflection on the sense and nonsense of human actions, by negating its effectiveness in protecting us from infections. Above all, it served as a pretext for a discussion on civil liberties and freedom of choice. Worse still, there are already media reports of aggressive behaviour demonstrated towards people wearing, or not wearing, a mask in public places. Some of these incidents ended in the death of one of the participants in the conflict.

In view of the entanglement of the mask in discussions about social generalities, attempts to personalize it, familiarize it or use it as a manifestation of the attitudes of people who put it on, for example, by selecting colours matching the reset of outfit, placing symbols or slogans on it, and even a schematic drawing of teeth, making the face of the person wearing such a half-mask resemble a skull, seem all insignificant. But even such use of the mask cannot be underestimated, as it is related to the lifestyle and conveys socially significant messages.

Rev. Edward Wojtusiak gave the subtitle "a sociological essay" to his considerations. An essay is a literary form that presents the point of view of its author, so it is a voice on a matter rather than a presentation of a scientific theory. Perhaps in this way he wanted to reach a larger group of recipients than just researchers interested in this topic. It is certainly intriguing that the article by Rev. Wojtusiak was published at the time the screens of TV sets in Poland featured speakers in military uniforms, and the very word "uniform" was commonly associated with militia and military patrols, which became a common sight during the martial law period. Was it an accidental coincidence, or was it rather his comment on the situation in which the abstract construct began to take on a real dimension? The answer can be easily found in the quoted article. Today, we are facing another challenge in this area: the term "mask", which until recently played a figurative role or that of a prop, has acquired completely new meanings, opening up a rich field of research for psychologists.

Rev. Władysław Tarasek, the author of the only larger sketch on Rev. Wojtusiak, quoted a fragment of his letter, which was a request to the superior authorities to release him from the function of dean: "What I suffered in prisions and Nazi camps, and also the sad times of the postwar anti-Hitler terror and the opportunistic attitudes of some members of our Episcopate, who are afraid to stigmatize the intolerance of official factors in People's Poland in relation to religion and its followers, even when the communists themselves did it - all that had a negative impact on my health (...)" (Tarasek, 2007, p. 271-272). Perhaps these confessions explain the author's interest in the issue of social masks, which, as these few sentences demonstrate, he himself did not "put on". Today, however, when the problem of the mask returns in completely new contexts, it is worth paying more attention to it, and the concept of the social uniform by Rev. Wojtusiak, describing a number of interesting aspects of this topic, may be a good starting point for such research and reflections.

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